

# The New Department of Highway Safety

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As a result of extensive investigations and studies of the highway situation by the 100th General Assembly, a new state department was created, known as the Department of Highway Safety.<sup>1</sup> It is the state's legislative answer to the rising accident and death tolls on our highways.

The legislative intent of this departmental revamping is two-fold and can be concisely stated:

1. To restrict the Department of Highways to the business of road construction and repair;

2. To combine all state highway regulatory functions into one department in an effort to educate the public about safety on the highways.

This intent was effected by simply carving the functions of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and the State Highway Patrol from the Department of Highways and placing them in the new department. These functions are the licensing of motor vehicles,<sup>2</sup> the registration of motor vehicles,<sup>3</sup> the issuance of drivers' licenses,<sup>4</sup> the administration of the financial responsibility law,<sup>5</sup> the enforcement of traffic laws,<sup>6</sup> the licensing of automobile dealers and salesmen,<sup>7</sup> and the administration of the State Highway Patrol.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these functions derived from the Department of Highways, the new department is charged with four new safety functions which are as follows:

1. Compile, analyze, and publish statistics relative to motor vehicle accidents and the causes thereof;

2. Prepare and conduct educational programs for the purpose of promoting safety in the operation of motor vehicles on the highways;

3. Assist and encourage the operation of driver training instruction in the public schools;

4. Conduct research and studies for the purpose of promoting safety on the highways of this state.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amended House Bill No. 243, effective October 2, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 4503.01 to 4503.37, inclusive.

<sup>3</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 4505.01 to 4505.19, inclusive.

<sup>4</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 4507.01 to 4507.39, inclusive.

<sup>5</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 4509.01 to 4509.78, inclusive.

<sup>6</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 4511.01 to 4511.78, inclusive, and 4513.01 to 4513.40, inclusive.

<sup>7</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 4517.01 to 4517.19, inclusive.

<sup>8</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 5503.01 to 5503.24, inclusive.

<sup>9</sup> OHIO REV. CODE 5502.01.

The Highway Investigating Committee of the Ohio Program Commission, which recommended the creation of this department, concluded that "The state highway department should not be concerned with the direction or control of activities unrelated to the construction and maintenance of the highways of this state."<sup>10</sup> The functions of the Department of Highways ran in opposite directions having only one common characteristic—the highways. Such diverse functions cannot possibly be correlated in one department having a single director since proper emphasis and direction would seldom be applied to the individual functions.

The new department allows a concentrated effort to be maintained by the state in the campaign for safety on the highways. It is the first attempt by the state to educate the public to the fundamentals of highway safety by a comprehensive method. The Department of Highways has stressed highway safety only in connection with engineering methods of highway construction because it has never been given the duty to educate the public. Since most highway accidents are caused by the negligence of drivers and not by poor engineering methods it is obvious that something more was needed.

Whether or not this new department stressing only highway safety is the answer is, of course, only argumentative. It is apparent that the Department of Highway Safety will not by itself check the purge of the highways but it is certainly a step in the right direction to have the most effective governmental structure that is possible.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ohio Program Commission, Final Report of the Highway Investigating Committee, Recommendation No. 6.

<sup>11</sup> The Council of State Governments, Highway Safety, 1950; pp. 15 and 16.